

STAFF REPORT
City of Lancaster, California

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Date: August 11, 2009

To: Mayor Parris and City Council Members

From: Jason Caudle, Deputy City Manager

Subject: **Approval of the Boulevard Public Realm Design Concepts and Authorization to allow Moule & Polyzoides, Architects and Urbanists, in Conjunction with other Design Professionals to Prepare Construction Plans and Specifications.**

Recommendation:

Approve the preliminary concept design of Lancaster Boulevard as presented by the consultants and authorize preparation of construction plans and specifications.

Fiscal Impact:

The Redevelopment Agency has budgeted \$9.5 million for this project. Of this amount, \$500,000.00 has been allocated for construction, design and engineering fees.

Background:

In May 2009, the City Council approved a contract for Moule & Polyzoides, Architects and Urbanists to begin the process of transforming Lancaster Boulevard and the arterial streets included in the Downtown Lancaster Specific Plan into a pedestrian-friendly environment.

This important project has proceeded rapidly, as the redesign of Downtown Lancaster will be a tipping point in the revitalization of the City's central core. This reconfigured space will act as a competitive differentiator and a catalyst for economic prosperity for the entire community. Downtown rehabilitation will provide a diverse and unique destination that provides a sense of place teeming with shops, music, cafes, galleries and a bistro, which captivates participants and is experiential.

The Boulevard is envisioned as the center of arts and culture for our community. This metamorphosis will attract a creative class to Lancaster. The renewed downtown will also act as a tourist destination, attracting visitors who will become satisfied shoppers.

The metamorphosis will occur in the following ways:

The streetscape will be transformed from vehicle-friendly to pedestrian-friendly. Eliminating two lanes of traffic and reducing traffic speeds will increase safety and visibility for pedestrians, ultimately providing a safe experience for shopping and dining.

The consultants are recommending that a “Ramblas” public space concept be created. This shared gathering area was inspired by a similar street treatment that now exists in Barcelona, Spain. This innovative approach will create a multi-use space that will facilitate special events, shared parking, and eventually could act as a path for public transportation. The proposed scheme will also accommodate 38 parking spaces per block. On-street parking is significantly more valuable to businesses due to visibility and it is estimated that each space could be worth as much as \$100,000 per year to adjacent businesses. Incorporating mature deciduous trees within the center of the street provides shaded parking on a daily basis. It also defines a space where street fairs and special events can occur and provides a shaded place from which to watch passing parades. The additional landscaping will help mitigate Lancaster’s seasonal breezes and high temperatures.

Midblock crosswalks are recommended to facilitate “cross-shopping” on both sides of the street, which is very important in a vital downtown. These also increase the traffic-calming function of the “main street” environment.

A number of programs that will be considered, such as façade improvement, signage and wayfinding, will encourage local businesses to partner with the City to create a welcoming atmosphere.

The nighttime Boulevard experience is part of the design, as pedestrian-focused lighting will be incorporated. The design for the Boulevard and adjoining streets will create a promenade atmosphere, promoting a pleasant walk-about experience.

The firm Moule & Polyzoides, Architects and Urbanists, in conjunction with other design professionals have been on the forefront of the new urbanist movement and have worked on many successful projects, including the Downtown Los Angeles Strategic Plan and the Getty Center. They are uniquely qualified and have the ability to get the job done in a compressed timeframe. Central to their practice is the idea of coherence and the community bonds necessary to sustain family and civic life. If the council agrees with the staff recommendation, it is appropriate to take action to allow the City Manager or his designee to execute the necessary contracts. Due to their unique services and qualities, time constraints on the project, and prior history with the Lancaster Downtown Project, staff recommends that we sole-source the design process and forego the standard RFQ process for all consultants on the project.